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Introduction: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Faith and Global Theology

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During the final decades, there has hardly been a doctrinal topic that aroused so much theological reflection and discussion as the doctrine of the Trinity. Numerous articles, books, and collections of essays have been published by theologians from all major Christian denominations in which the continuing meaning and relevance of this doctrine is explored and substantiated. Since in the 20th century Karl Barth and Karl Rahner put the theme on top of the theological agenda after ages of trinitarian oblivion, we seem to have collectively moved towards an era of what has come to be known as the 'trinitarian renaissance.' This renaissance—or revival, as it is also sometimes called—is not restricted to the doctrine of the Trinity as such, but tends to affect the overall scheme of how Christian theology is being done. When the doctrine of the Trinity is what binds most Christians together, then how should it influence Christian faith and theology as a whole? How should it influence, for example, the way in which we conceive of the church, or our anthropology, or even our understanding of the sacraments? Such questions are far from idiosyncratic by now. All in all, the rebirth of trinitarian theology is generally seen as "one of the most far-reaching theological developments of the [20th] century" (Stanley J. Grenz).

As the editorial board of JRT, we felt intrigued by this surprising and multifaceted development, which no one in the field would have expected a century or so ago. Therefore, we decided to organize a theme issue on the phenomenon, in order to chart some of the trajectories and ramifications of the trinitarian renaissance, and perhaps to make a provisional assessment of its lasting significance. We invited nine theologians from all over the world, all of them with a certain track record in the field, to contribute to this special issue. In doing so, we anticipated a situation in which one or two of our invited authors might unfortunately have to drop out during the process, either as a

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result of their not being able (due to whatever circumstances) to meet the commitment to write the requested paper, or as a result of a negative judgment by our external referee (whose advice we would have felt obliged to follow in that case). What happened, however, was that we ended the process of writing, reviewing, and revising the papers with no less than nine finished articles, all of which we are proud to publish in JRT.

Meanwhile, this more or less unexpected success also created a problem: nine articles (and some of them rather lengthy) are just too many to publish in one issue, given the scope of the Journal. So we decided to divide the stock of articles into two sets, one of which appears in the present issue, and the other of which will be published in the next one. Given the mutual coherence of their themes, we decided to delay publication of the papers on the pursuit of trinitarian theology in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to the next issue. The result of this necessary decision is that the present issue is incomplete. We intentionally point this out to our readers as a kind of warning in advance. In case someone sees a preoccupation with Western forms of doing (trinitarian) theology in the present issue, he may be fully right—but we firmly intend to correct this one-sided emphasis soon. It will be very interesting to read both series of papers in a complementary way, in order to determine how current elaborations of the doctrine of the Trinity in the wider world relate to the heritage of classical Christianity as explored in the present issue.

Let me now give an overview of what the reader can expect in the following pages. First of all, we have asked Finnish-American theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, who wrote several books on (the aspects of) the doctrine of the Trinity, to introduce us to the remarkable resurgence of trinitarian theology during the past century. Given his almost encyclopedic work, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville Kt. 2007), nobody seemed more capable of fulfilling this rather difficult task than Kärkkäinen, and fortunately he did not disappoint us. Kärkkäinen sets about by showing how the doctrine of the Trinity gradually became marginalized over many past centuries. Next, he lists some key motifs and orientations in the contemporary trinitarian reflection, and especially focuses on three significant developments in this connection which will probably have a lasting influence: the rise to prominence of 'communion theology,' the desire the pursue the practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the contextualization of reflection on the Trinity in different cultures. Finally, drawing on the contributions of LaCugna, Moltmann, and Pannenberg, Kärkkäinen points out that at the heart of the ongoing debate stands the question of the relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity.

The first one to apply the term 'renaissance'—as distinct from 'revolution,' on the one hand, and 'restoration,' on the other—to the new interest in trinitarian theology presumably was German theologian Christoph Schwöbel (then in London, now in Tübingen), in the introductory chapter he wrote to a conference volume on *Trinitarian Theology Today* (Edinburgh 1995). In his contribution to the present issue, Schwöbel provides us with a succinct up-to-date account of the genesis of trinitarian doctrine during the first centuries A.D. With painstaking precision, he traces its deepest sources in what he calls the "prototrinitarian grammar of discourse on God" in the New Testament and even in the presuppositions of this grammar in the Old Testament. Thus, contrary to the thesis of Harnack (which is as outdated as it is well-known), Schwöbel shows that first of all it was Jerusalem rather than Athens—i.e., the biblical witness rather than Greek metaphysics—that gave rise to the dogma of the Trinity. Greek metaphysics only came in when it turned out that the early Christians "could not express the universality of the truth they claimed for God's self-disclosure through Christ in the Spirit without engaging in a (…) discussion with Greek philosophy." This was a very risky experiment, since shaping trinitarian doctrine by means of Greek philosophical categories implied a conceptual redefinition that went against its original import and purpose. Schwöbel shows, however, how the crucial link to the biblical witness was re-established by the Cappadocian fathers and subsequently adopted by the Council of Constantinople (381). He winds up stating that in order to be fruitful trinitarian theology today has to also be involved in a constant go-between between Jerusalem and Athens.

Having focused on the first centuries A.D. in this way, we continue our journey through history, now following the lead of Robert Letham, a Reformed theologian from Wales who wrote a widely acclaimed comprehensive study on *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, 2004). Letham takes up the thread where Schwöbel left it, starting with the Cappadocian Fathers and the Council of Constantinople. He then goes on to explain why, unfortunately, the issue of the doctrine of the Trinity was not definitely settled at this Council, since during the next centuries a divergence occurred between developments in the Eastern and Western parts of the church. Although, following other contemporary interpreters, Letham qualifies Theodore de Régnon's famous sharp distinction between Eastern and Western trinitarianism, he argues that the 'acid test' of the liturgy clarifies that there simply *is* a contrast between Eastern and Western ways of conceiving of the Trinity. Historically, this contrast found its focal point in the *filioque*-controversy. Therefore, after having sketched the wider contours of the divergence,

Letham extensively discusses the pros and cons of the (addition of the) *filioque*-clause. He also tries to give an evaluation of the different motives that are involved, which strikes at least one reader as quite fair and well-balanced. The paper is concluded by some suggestions that might help us to find 'the way forward' in this debate (which, by the way, began exactly 1200 years ago with a quarrel between Byzantine and Western monks on Christmas Day 808 in Bethlehem). Letham thinks that the Cyrilline phrase *from the Father in the Son* might be more helpful than any of its alternatives in this connection.

With the paper of Dirkie Smit (Stellenbosch, South Africa), we enter a further stage in the doctrine's historical development. Smit poses a question which is seldom explicitly addressed in the literature up to now, but which may nevertheless be experienced as very exciting—at least by those who share the denominational background of this Journal: "Is it possible to distinguish a specific *Reformed* perspective regarding the doctrine of the Trinity?" In an argument which is as informative and creative as it is cautious, Smit tends to answer this question in the affirmative. That is, he distinguishes five dominant motifs that are not only regularly (though not uncontroversially) attributed to founding father John Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity, but also find expression and elaboration in the writings of well-known and representative Reformed theologians today. These motifs are reflected in the claims that the doctrine is an attempt to follow the rules of biblical grammar when speaking about God (1); that it intends to portray God as the living God (2); that it enables a 'trinitarian spread', thus allowing for an indispensable plurality of perspectives by intentionally describing God's works in a threefold way (3); that it serves soteriological, even pastoral purposes (4); and that it provides a practical pattern for ecclesiology, life and mission (5). To substantiate his thesis, Smit draws upon a wealth of classical and contemporary material from Reformed theologians in many countries.

Having finished our explorations in contemporary theology, scripture, and tradition, we continue with separate discussions of two issues that no doubt belong to the most central and most vexed questions in the ongoing revival of trinitarian theology. Perhaps, one might even say that these two questions (next to the question of whether we should use the concept of 'person' for the divine *hypostases*) are *the* focal points in the contemporary debate. How one decides about them, has a lot of consequences for the whole of one's theological vision.

First of all, Stephen Holmes (St. Andrews, Scotland), who is a pupil of the late Reformed theologian and prolific catalyst of the trinitarian renaissance Colin Gunton, tackles the issue of 'three versus one.' That is, he examines whether we should prefer the so-called 'social' doctrine of the Trinity, which

figures so prominently in contemporary trinitarian reflection, to its 'Latin' alternative. As is well-known, a crude way to state the difference between these two is by saying that the social doctrine starts from the three divine persons in order to conceive of their unity only in the second place, whereas the Latin doctrine tries to move precisely the other way around. Holmes goes at some length to show the attractions of social trinitarianism—the reader might even feel converted to this view by the end of this part of his paper. Then, however, Holmes goes on to put forward some objections against the social doctrine of the Trinity—objections which turn out to be, rather than signifying only minor problems, rather 'devastating.' First of all, Holmes points out that the claim that the social doctrine is practically and ethically useful is highly problematic. Second, he tries to show that adherents of social trinitarianism deviate in crucial aspects from the Cappadocian (and other important) Fathers. And third, he radically questions the claim that social trinitarianism is "in fact the best way to appropriate the biblical witness." Holmes concludes his argument with the fascinating suggestion that social trinitarians today use the doctrine of the Trinity to answer questions which the Fathers answered by Christology.

Second, Seung Goo Lee from Seoul, South Korea, makes the circle round by aptly addresses the issue of the relation between the economic and the immanent Trinity, which was already referred to in the first paper by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen as being "at the heart of the ongoing debate." Lee takes his starting point in what he sees as "the classic model," shared by both the Eastern and the Western church. The basic idea behind this model is that the economic Trinity is the epistemological ground of the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the ontological ground of the economic Trinity. Lee goes on to corroborate this model by looking at the way in which two influential Reformed theologians understood the Trinity, viz. John Calvin and Herman Bavinck. Next, he introduces the "model of the new theology of the cross," by which he means the innovative proposals made in this connection by Eberhard Jüngel and Jürgen Moltmann (he mainly focuses on the latter). Characteristic of these proposals is that the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity seems to be surrendered. Third, Lee discusses and criticizes the model of Dutch Reformed theologian Hendrikus Berkhof, who seems to leave us with only the economic Trinity. Lee concludes that, although both of the contemporary models certainly have their attractions, we have every reason to remain faithful to the classic model.

All in all, as editors we think that the six papers collected in this issue, together with the three that will follow in the next one, offer an up-to-date

and representative view of present day scholarship with regard to both the historical vicissitudes of the doctrine of the Trinity and its theological ramifications. It is our hope that these explorations, even when they are not conclusive but may open up at least as many questions as they answer, will help the reader to see what is really at stake in the age-old conviction that the God of Israel is revealed to us as Father, Son, and Spirit—being three equally divine *hypostases* in one being. What is even more important, however, we hope that the papers published here may stimulate the reader to be aware of what he or she is doing in the liturgy, which even in the West has pervasive reminiscences to the triune character of God. For as we need a go-between between Jerusalem and Athens, East and West, the Reformed tradition and other confessions, the oneness and the threeness of God, and between the economic and the immanent Trinity, we also need a fruitful interaction between the second order task of theology and the first order task of worshiping the triune God in the liturgy as well as in the practice of life.